

Labor and Public Employees Commission – FMLA - Thursday February 10, 2011

I come here today representing 155 paraeducators in the Wallingford School District as well as another 230 paraprofessionals in UE 222 and also in solidarity with other paraeducators throughout the state of Connecticut in other unions. Many of them would be here today but they are dedicated to the needs of children over the needs for themselves and feel with all of the snow days and the pressure of CMTs and CAPTS they feel they need to be in the classroom. I further must note that I am coming with true understanding of the paraeducator as I have been one for over 11 years until most recently.

As paraeducators, we view the FMLA Act as part of the healthcare crisis in this state. It is a major concern to this working community and we are becoming more aware that health care is more than just insurance and access to medical treatment. The Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) is a large part of the healthcare crisis and it is seriously flawed. For those ten month workers in municipal employment no protection is offered to them. As we know we have ten month workers in our union who do not benefit from FMLA because we do not work the mandatory 1250 hours required to receive FMLA however we contribute as much to the educational community as do other 10 month workers such as teachers who work the 1250 hours. We work a minimum of 180 days a year and approximately 6.25 hours a day. It is not that we do not want to work the 1250 hours we are not given those hours to work.

Many of us working in these jobs are women who work in public elementary and secondary schools. We do many of the same tasks as teachers and are considered part of the educational team. We provide important opportunities for the youth of our state but do not receive the respect of being allowed to tend to our families when the need arises. Often we must decide between employment or the health of our family or our own health. Since we don't have FMLA if we take the time off without pay we are required to pay the full insurance premium of the district instead of just our portion of it if we were using FMLA time. This comes at a most stressful time mentally, physically as well as financially in our lives.

This is unconscionable in this day and age and in this industrialized nation. It is for these reasons that I as well as UE 222 support the lowering of the hours to work in order to qualify for FMLA. We would ask you to please support lowering the legislation at the state level in order for us as essential members of the educational team to qualify for FMLA so we will never again have to weigh our health with the question of our employment. I thank you for your time.

Respectfully submitted, Annie MacDonald, UE Field Organizer

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